



# Macbeth's descent into darkness

By Anugrah Navitt

Macbeth the most famous play of Shakespeare well read throughout the world due to its brilliant presentation of a heroic and villainous General of King Duncan. The main aim of Shakespeare was to bring the attention of the London people to the Scottish history as no one was interested in it those days. He creates a man who is ambitious to gain greater happiness losing all his humanitarian ethics. He kills his king and his friend and later many innocent men, women and children were slaughtered by him. This play leaves us with so many unanswered questions that why did Macbeth kill his king? Was it only to get the crown, why does he kill his innocent friend Banquo and then the killings of the people goes on for no specific reason? Why did he commit so much of evil? Was it because of his fate pronounced by the evil witches? Was this reason enough for so much of bloodshed?

Yet just as Macbeth himself is a traitor—to his king, his friends, his country, and to God—so, too, is the play steeped in both evil and betrayal....The prime importance of the witches, in this play, is in no way extrinsic: Macbeth is drawn to them, and they appear to him, because the evil aspects of his nature.<sup>1</sup>

In this play it can be seen how Shakespeare's mind is meandering to different directions yet steady in his thoughts when he opens the play with a supernatural entrance of the three witches in the wasteland of Scotland blending a concoction of insects and reptiles in the middle of the night amidst thunder and storm. This has some resemblance with Hamlet as the ghost is replaced by the witches in Macbeth. The witches inculcate a criminal idea into the mind of Macbeth that took the shape of lust, power and greed to become the king of Scotland; they impregnated a sinister idea in his mind but they never mentioned that he should murder the king in order to achieve his goals.

The special popularity of Hamlet and Macbeth is due in part to some of these common characteristics, notably to the fascination of the supernatural, the absence of the spectacle of extreme undeserved suffering,...The reader who looks unwillingly Lago gazes at Lady Macbeth in awe, because though she is dreadful she is also sublime. The whole tragedy is sublime. In this, however, and in other respects, Macbeth makes an impression quite different from that of Hamlet.<sup>2</sup>

Impressed by the ideas given by the witches Macbeth and his wife Lady Macbeth both succumb to the thoughts and murder the king; ensuing this they are hounded by their own trepidation turning into hallucination that would further horrify them and lead them to insanity and finally they meet their ultimate fate of Macbeth being killed and his wife commits suicide; this play is a wonderful example of tragic irony created by Shakespeare that plays with the emotions of the viewers and its readers. However this evil installed in Macbeth's mind by the witches had sundry feeling in him with crime at one hand and his dedication to the king on the other; creating a psychological war in his mind. The character of Macbeth detaches him from other Shakespearean villains; Macbeth is stubborn he persistently chases his evil desires at any cost without realizing the consequences of what he had made up in his mind to accomplish. The irony of the play is despite of his bloody thoughts in his mind he is instead decorated by the king especially when the bloodied captain arrives and speaks well about both the generals Macbeth and Banquo how valiantly they fought against the Norwegian army and won. Macbeth was presented as a hero and the title of the executed thane of Cawdor was given to him as further adornment of his valiance, Macbeth is shown as a violent man as often he enters the king's court drenched in blood of the enemies and of his own blood an indication to his loyalty to the king; this was the greatest error of the king not apprehending what was cooking in the mind of Macbeth and he granted all praise to him as a gift for his prowess and heroic actions in the war. This courageous hero was unsure to execute his plans due to his two conflicting thoughts in his internal conscious of allegiance to the king; and his ambition and greed of power his external apparition.

<sup>1</sup> Burton Raffel, *Macbeth: The Annotated Shakespeare*, London: Yale University Press 2005. p.19.

<sup>2</sup> John Russell Brown, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, III ed. *New Introduction by A.C. Bradley* New York: St. Martin's Press. 1992, p. 290.

Macbeth's tragedy lies in a conflict that folds a politically realized fantasy of power into the struggle between prelapsarian order and postlapsarian desire. Banquo's cursed thoughts are the excesses, reversions to undifferentiated similitude that a waking political existence regiments and contains. Macbeth's actions reject the controlling imperatives of Nature and catapult him into a world of nightmare in which human desire that is the dark side of a sovereign politics is doomed never to be satisfied.<sup>3</sup>

Macbeth surrenders to his wife lady Macbeth who almost paralyzed him psychologically and forced him to continue with his plans instilled in his mind by the witches. After the murder of the king this creepy design in Macbeth's psyche troubled him for what he had done forced by his wife. An old saying that praises women that: **"there is a woman behind every successful man"**. Nonetheless, here it is opposite that instead of stopping her husband Lady Macbeth instigates and forces Macbeth for murder; he was hard-pressed to kill that finally brought his absolute destruction; the tragedy begins here as both of them go berserk thereafter; Macbeth not only heroically won the battles for the king but he turned into a villain and an adversary to the king apart from being his most trusted general; an apparent case of betrayal, greed and hunger of power that any man can fall to such enticement. Albeit the beginning of the scenes raises the emotions of the readers and viewers and makes Macbeth a hero; rather Shakespeare himself becomes a hero for his mental engineering and creativity that brought one of the best classics in the history of English Literature. The management of the acts in Macbeth is so neatly done that it moves like a tsunami in the minds of the readers and culminates into one of the greatest and unforgettable tragedies.

The play moves rapidly and suspense fully, climaxing in a battle, its protagonists are alternately admired and abhorred, fortunate and miserable; self assured and terrified; gratified and tormented.<sup>4</sup>

The dialogues are beautifully studded in the play while soliloquy dominates the emotional aspects of the scenes and the play goes on extremely well; the acts are wonderfully steered by Shakespeare therefore the play is incontestable among the writers and the lovers of English literature and it shows Shakespeare's grand aptitude though contradictory in nature yet one of the best. However the play is a marvelous piece of literature written by Shakespeare; and every scene and dialogue was the outcome of his mastermind.

**Was Macbeth a true hero?** The play describes Macbeth as a hero in the beginning who later becomes a villain. In its first act where the witches congregate and prophesy about Macbeth becoming a king and he falling susceptible to the inducement; the important thing to be noted here is that the witches only talked about the titles that Macbeth will be attaining but they did not provoke Macbeth to practically take any such horrendous action; they had just announced the future but not how the future will be achieved; there could have been many other ways for him to become a king but here lies the deception of the witches that they provoke the greed and ambition in Macbeth which he did not know how to fulfill or how to achieve the titles announced by the witches and it is nowhere seen that he takes any vow that he will be doing such dastardly thing.

Macbeth's imagination invents the murder of Duncan. The heinousness of the act owes in part to its being unprovoked and unprecedented. Perhaps a kind of precedent consists in the recently defeated rebels, who also sought Duncan's life and crown. But slaughter in the open field is one thing and murder in private chambers another; and Macbeth, who engages in both, registers the difference between the two as he passes full of self-loathing from field to chamber to do a deed so grotesquely original that it cannot be named.<sup>5</sup>

However Lady Macbeth is bent upon taking the titles by all means and she forces Macbeth to murder the king by presenting horrible challenges before Macbeth including daring his manhood; Macbeth was never determined to kill the king till now and wedged to his fidelity and his responsibilities towards the king; his humane character suppressed all negative feelings: but the wickedness befalls on him through his wife's repeated nagging making him into a coward as she had raised the questions of his manhood which almost defeated Macbeth. He was psychologically paralyzed in squabble and he gave up to the desires of his wife and accepted the age old idea of manhood. How on earth a wife can exploit such an oblique angle of her husband's vulnerability towards greed and force him to do all evil. Macbeth had to prove his manhood before his wife that he is not a coward and that she cannot overpower him therefore he had to prove by doing the utmost wickedness to achieve what his wife wanted him to do. Macbeth now turns to kill King Duncan as he was convinced by Lady Macbeth that accepting the ethics of a brave warrior and taking a manly action instead of being a humanitarian he determines to do what was extremely unethical to his own conscious before having the dialogue with Lady Macbeth. He did not only kill the king but also a saint like figure whose benign existence was once a blessing to Scotland. However by making Macbeth act alone and not colluding with other powerful people or his comrades; Shakespeare wanted to showcase absolutely virtuous issues untainted by the darker shades of the diplomatic expediency. Can we call such a character or a so called valiant man a hero who can stumble by a supernatural event and being forced by his wife to commit a murder of a man who trusted him the most; can we call such an irresolute man a hero who is so acquiescent to above mentioned forces? Such vacillating characters do not belong to heroes' category committing blunders against their own master; the character of a hero has to be on one sided, firm and not vacillating in between like a pendulum. And if a hero is compelled by any external notion he never succumbs to that idea no matter what comes before him. Macbeth kept his ambitions buried in his mind only to execute his plans of murdering the king until the time was appropriate; such individuality cannot be considered a hero who hangs around an opportunity or an excuse to commit a dishonorable crime. However it was a play that was manipulated by Shakespeare to make his will, done well. And Macbeth was announced a hero in the beginning because he won king's

<sup>3</sup> John Drakakis & Dale Townshend, ed. Arden Early Modern Drama Guides: Macbeth A Critical Reader, London: Bloomsbury, 2013. p.151.

<sup>4</sup> Nick Moschovakis. ed. Macbeth: New Critical Essays: Shakespearean Criticism Vol.32. London, New York Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

<sup>5</sup> Harold Bloom, ed. Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, New Edition, New York. 2010, p.12.

important battles so gallantly; but for what, only to win the confidence of the king and when the opportunity came he turned into a villain to murder his own king. In this play Shakespeare is praising violence in double ways; first in a good way and secondly in a bad way without realizing the consequences of violence on the society. This turnover of behavior can be seen in reality but this character cannot be called a hero. This is one of the major weaknesses in this Shakespearean play. On the other hand none of the villains in other plays of Shakespeare behave what Macbeth was displayed in the story.

**Banquo another hero:** It would be appropriate to call Banquo a true hero instead of Macbeth. Banquo might have been ambitious but never a criminal minded man like Macbeth; nor was he jealous of Macbeth apart from often being sidelined by the king and was seldom given credit. He was always overshadowed by Macbeth. Such an attitude of the king can be seen at several places praising Macbeth but ignoring Banquo yet he never turned evil nor gave in to the prophecies; and instead he was present with Macbeth when the witches prophesied. Banquo's figure could be put in juxtaposition to Macbeth due to certain outer similarities but heart to heart Banquo was a nice gentleman; he stood sturdy to all the temptations of life and never turned to evil.

Banquo is an accessory to the murder of Duncan, but in Shakespeare's play that role is allotted exclusively to Lady Macbeth, while Banquo restrains himself from acting precipitately to bring about the Weird Sisters' prophecies.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Banquo, Macbeth mimics what the people face in their day today lives; temptations, greed, envy, guilt, shame and wanting to stop that but helpless due to his ravenous desires. Exactly the same way some of the modern day leaders can be identified as villains with Macbeth at certain levels. One important aspect that separates Banquo from Macbeth; he was not a villain and he had a clean conscious that did not delight in wickedness. Macbeth could be compared with doctor Faustus both remember deep down and wanted to stop or realize their grave mistakes yet no stopping. No amount of repentance could help them and there was no redemption in store for them. But Banquo always fought side by side with Macbeth as a true hero never fell for any enticement; apart from being present at the time of the prophecies spoken for him as well by the witches.

**Lady Macbeth in Macbeth's downfall:** Lady Macbeth could be deemed ultimately responsible for her own death and of her husband's devastation; instead of stopping Macbeth she contributed to evil desires and disabled him psychologically provoking him further to his greed and ambition. Her demanding nature and hurtful commentary triggered Macbeth's weakness which led him to concur with her and resultantly the murder of Duncan.

Lady Macbeth extends the process of the demonization of femininity in the play....Macbeth was 'greatly encouraged' by the words of the Weird Sisters, supplemented by the urging of his wife who lay sore upon him to attempt the Macbeth thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen'.<sup>7</sup>

Lady Macbeth insisted to get rid of the king by killing him; this is where Macbeth gained the courage to do so. While the witches only prophesied about Macbeth becoming the king but they never said anything like killing the king. Macbeth was never bold enough to execute the plan that he had in his mind. The readers could also see the shift in the power dynamics between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as she was the one who misguided and instigated her husband throughout the murder plan. At this point we witness the womanly figure guiding a male and pressurizing him to commit the vilest offence in order to usurp the throne from its rightful possessor.

Lady Macbeth cynically tells Duncan on his arrival that 'your majesty' loads our house....her desire demonically to cultivate Macbeth by pouring her 'spirits' into his ears and her anti Edenic advice to her husband: look like th', innocent flower,/But be the serpent under't'. In this context, the last word that Duncan trustingly speaks to Lady Macbeth before his death, 'hostess' is redolent with irony.<sup>8</sup>

In fact Macbeth never wanted to murder his king but Lady Macbeth had already plans in her mind that is why she provoked her husband occasionally for his ability to proceed with the plan that was already in her mind. At many occasions Lady Macbeth does accept that if she had not been a woman she would have executed the plan herself. And as a woman she is throws ugly challenges to Macbeth that she would be willing to smash the brains out of her nursing child suckling her breast if she had vowed. Lady Macbeth is violating the nature of womanhood an object of disgrace and embarrassment to motherhood. Macbeth also became a victim to his wife's ideas and he felt that if his wife will defeat him in prowess this would be the greatest insult of his manhood forever; apart from not being fully convinced to kill the king; his vacillating thoughts were in between the two opposing minds; ultimately Macbeth succumbed to his weakness in his decision to murder King Duncan and the provocation of Lady Macbeth was so evil that she exposed her plan before Macbeth in the below mentioned words:

Lady Macbeth: We fail!  
But screw your courage to the sticking place,  
And we'll not fail...  
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,

<sup>6</sup> Ann Thompson, ed. *Macbeth The State of Play: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. p.10.

<sup>7</sup>Harold Bloom. p. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> John Drakakis, & Dale Townshend, ed. *Arden Early Modern Drama Guides: Macbeth A Critical Reader*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.p. 161.



That memory, the warder of the brain,  
 Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
 A limbec only: when in swinish sleep....  
 His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt  
 Of our great quell.<sup>9</sup>

This was the strategic design perpetrated by Lady Macbeth; to encourage Macbeth for killing the king and blame the drunken body guards drugged by her. However having killed the king Macbeth was never pleased for what he had done, he never wanted to take this road by doing unethical means. But Lady Macbeth continues to contribute and support her husband to delve deeper into deeper immorality and become unsympathetic, power hungry and unsuspecting which led him towards his inevitable downfall. In fact Shakespeare wanted to show that it is not worth killing someone and usurping his powers and belongings that nothing could be truly acquired by acts of evil as the burden of culpability and mortification will never leave the individual at peace.

Lady Macbeth is the constant driving force behind her husband's misdeeds as she is shown to be more ruthless, corrupt and power hungry than Macbeth. She is projected just opposite to the other female protagonists in Shakespeare's plays. Secondly Lady Macbeth was not meek obedient, foolish, emotional if we compare her with queen Gertrude or Ophelia from Hamlet; these figures are world apart from Lady Macbeth as she was power hungry, forceful, ambitious and much more evil and cruel than Macbeth as she was willing to kill Duncan by herself.

Evil in every sense: cosmic sickness, personal sickness, personal neurosis, the consequence of sin, the experience of sin, blood leading to more blood, and that, in a way, leading inevitably to regeneration. Disease or crime, or evil, induces death, which induces life. Macbeth presents this cycle of living and, in that sense I find it the most metaphysical of Shakespeare's plays – an unblinking look at the nature of evil in the person and in the state, and in the cosmos.<sup>10</sup>

She instead of discouraging Macbeth forces him to man-up and do every ghastly deed imaginable to execute in order to achieve what wasn't rightfully or lawfully belonging to them. The cruelty of Lady Macbeth can be seen more than her husband as she does not even bat her eyes or question her own morality to seek the throne. The only thing that is pushing her back is that she is a woman; had she been a man she would have done the deed herself. Unlike Macbeth his wife is not a fickle minded person as she was ready to destroy every being that comes between her ambitions especially the throne. Her evil knows no bounds and her spirit is anything but wavering. On the other hand Macbeth seems to be more human than his wife who is standing on the cross-road still thinking whether to do it or not to do it? But Lady Macbeth is literally an example of a wolf in a sheep's skin and even though she looks pious and harmless but from inside she is ready to kill even if it was her own breast feeding child.

**Unnatural Events:** After Duncan's murder we see strange events occurring; the earth quack, wild winds, the unnatural behavior of Duncan's horses who began to cannibalize one another, the falcon being killed by an owl, the absence of sunlight in the morning, this shows the disturbed conditions of nature.

However nature's perfect harmony is portrayed in the absence of all above events when Duncan was alive. The disappearance of sunlight shows how the daylight was also snuffed exactly like King Duncan. Such unnatural and unexpected darkness after Duncan's death continues till the end of Macbeth's reign, which shows the distress caused by Macbeth not only to the family of Duncan, to his followers, allies, but also to the whole of Scotland. After murdering both his possible contenders Duncan and Banquo; Lady Macbeth and Macbeth thought that killing them would bring them happiness, joy and prosperity in their lives and they will be able to rule Scotland freely. But in reality all joy and happiness was far from them being free and prosperous. The guilt and the shame which they had to suffer every day were actually imploding in their hearts and mind; while Lady Macbeth was unable to eat or sleep peacefully, as she had almost forgotten what a good night sleep is all about; on the other hand Macbeth was also seriously perturbed to the point of hallucinations. Probably Shakespeare wanted the people to realize that the consequences of evil are always evil. Most of the above events described by Shakespeare after Duncan's death seem to be taken from the biblical account of the aftermath of Jesus' death. Even though all the ghastly events mirror Macbeth's evil which were slowly permeating throughout the Scotland air. Such an act did not only agitate Macbeth but the entire country and the nature as well was upset due to the evil committed by him.

**Macduff the savior in the play:** Macduff the thane of Fife happens to contrast Macbeth in many ways; he becomes a kind of hero by saving his motherland Scotland like a true patriot. He puts his country always before any other thing. Actually Macduff having many qualities which could have been compared with Macbeth in his early time but he turned in a 180 degree and became tainted into corruption for his own destruction. What was amusing that after killing the king Macbeth pleaded allegiance to Malcolm his son who was the rightful heir of the throne. On the other hand Shakespeare chose not to highlight and give much importance to Macduff but made sure for his presence for his statement:

O horror! Horror! Horror! Tongue, nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee!<sup>11</sup>

It has been seen that evil may over power goodness for some time but goodness wins at the end. Such was the condition of Macbeth and his wife at the end of the play. Perhaps Shakespeare wanted to make Macduff as the main hero who avenges Macbeth in order to relieve the people of Scotland against the tyranny of the maniac like Macbeth. He wanted to compare Macbeth with Macduff as two sides of the same coin. Symbols of good and evil, moral against immoral, saint against sinner, hero verses villain. Macduff becomes a

<sup>9</sup> Rajendra Paul. Macbeth. xxxv ed. Rama Brothers India Pvt, Ltd., 2023. p. 162 & 164.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Bradshaw, The Connell Guide to Shakespeare's Macbeth. Chippenham, Wiltshire. 2012 p.10.

<sup>11</sup> Rajendra Paul. P.180.

symbol of vengeance as he planned to avenge his slain family, the king and many other people killed by Macbeth and by doing this he became a manifestation of justice by putting an end to the murderer of the play Macbeth.

Macduff receives the news of the slaughter of his wife and babes. Yet the first of these, we are told even by Coleridge, is unworthy of Shakespeare and is not his....I question if either this scene or the exhibition of Macduff's grief is required to heighten our abhorrence of Macbeth cruelty. They have a technical value in helping to give the last stage of the action the form of a conflict between Macbeth and Macduff. But their chief function is of another kind. It is to touch the heart with a sense of beauty and pathos, to open the springs of love and of tears.<sup>12</sup>

Macduff stands as the arch enemy of Macbeth who finally killed him; yet he did not give up any of his own characters. Macduff was always the secondary character in the play nonetheless he performs the most important role by killing Macbeth and redeeming his country out of his clutches. Shakespeare also used Macduff to shatter Macbeth's foolish illusion that no man can kill him who is born of a woman but Macduff announced his own birth that his mother's womb was ripped apart and he was born. Therefore he became the killer of Macbeth; this happenstance also throws light on the enigmatic prophecies of the witches as inconsistent at several occasions.

**Three weird sisters:** Witchcraft is a prominent practice in Shakespeare's plays; witches normally happen to be women belonging to a small community or household who are apparently involved in occult practices for their happiness and benefits but they were a persecuted group throughout Europe. Shakespeare brings the supernatural element and introduces the wicked witches in the play who became one of the main reasons of Macbeth's downfall and demise as well. The first appearance of the witches seem to be for nothing but to tell each other that we will meet again such a meeting is a useless meeting and solves no purpose but some scholar believe that the actual reason for the first meeting was to strike the key note of the characters of the drama. On the other hand prophecies proclaimed by the witches were in such a way that Macbeth believed that it was an absolute truth and his future is announced by them; he argued for their truthfulness:

This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill; cannot be good: If ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair.<sup>13</sup>

Here we can see that their first prophecy was instantly fulfilled that he will be the Thane of Cawdor as it was reported by Ross and Angus on the desolate heath that the title of Thane of Cawdor was conferred upon him and the present thane would be executed soon. However all their prophecies could not be fulfilled as they were just a concoction of scrap and all that was announced was filled with loopholes and contradictions?

The weird Sisters present nouns rather than verbs. They put titles on Macbeth without telling what actions he must carry out to attain those titles. It is Lady Macbeth who supplies the verbs. Understanding that her husband is torn between the now-articulated objects of desire and the fearful deed that must achieve it.<sup>14</sup>

Macbeth was fully inclined to believe that such supernatural figures had great importance and immense knowledge about the person's destiny. But witches are always wicked and looking dreadful with ulterior motives that are morally wrong. They are demonic figures indulging into satanic powers to lure people to give in to their darkest desires and push them into ultimate devastation. They seduced Macbeth by addressing him with high esteem though it was all deception: the first witch calls him by the title of Thane of Glamis; and the second one calls him Thane of Cawdor; and the third one tells him that he will become the king of Scotland. These highly respectable addresses were misleading which Macbeth could not understand and went ahead to believe them and act upon it. Such satanic characters are also found in doctor Faustus as the demon added fantasies to his eternal damnation. In Macbeth the wicked witches began the dramatic turn of events into his life through the mysterious prophecies they pronounced. Similarly in Hamlet we can see king Hamlet's apparition that was most dominant and dramatic device that was used and the same we can see in Macbeth. It may be argued that the witches showed Macbeth a mirror to his dormant inner self making him realize who he really was under the disguise of a noble warrior; but the veracity of the proclamation was to entice him into eternal condemnation. Actually the witches did not put this idea into Macbeth's mind to kill the king rather it can be surmised that the idea was already there deep down in his mind and the witches only brought it on the surface by offering him a helping hand and egged him on; like Lady Macbeth who became the reason for Macbeth to fall from grace to disgrace. Macbeth's bad complex arises when he was told that he is indestructible until Birnam forest moved to Dunsinane or he is killed by a man not born of woman; both the thoughts are impossible and were just tainted riddles nicely distorted by the witches. Another reason for Macbeth's madness could be the realization that he is not a bad man but he is a mortal human being when he finds out that he could be killed like any other man when he learns that Macduff was born when his mother's

11. A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, III ed. *New Introduction by John Russell Brown*, New York: St. Martin's Press. 1992, p:345.

<sup>13</sup> Rajendra Paul. p.146.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Snyder. *Macbeth: A Modern Perspective*, Swarthmore College. Quoted by Kate Flaherty.

womb was ripped apart; this might have made Macbeth a humble man. And the thought of indispensability in his mind was one of the greatest mistakes for Macbeth that became the cause of his destruction.

### **Dramatic Irony:**

Shakespeare uses dramatic irony in the play to engage the audience and to help them understand the character on a deeper level; when the readers or viewers watch certain characters they look into their in-depth characteristics and traits and also learn about their ulterior motives. They begin to understand the fictional character on a personal level i.e. more of a human and not a made up as in reality people go through the same situations. When Dramatic irony is inducted at the right moment and situation it makes the characters more humane and believable; it also helps in the progression of the play due to various motives behind it showcasing the lies and deception of the characters. Shakespeare's Macbeth is full of dramatic irony present throughout the play; its first instance can be seen in Act I when the witches appear on the scene and address Macbeth as the thane of Cawdor which makes Macbeth gullible to their deceptive ideas or prophecies. Yet the audience watching the play could make out in advance as King Duncan had already given orders to Ross to declare Macbeth the thane of Cawdor as a reward for winning the battle against the Norwegian army. Another important dramatic irony can be seen when King Duncan gives a gratifying speech about his hosts Macbeth and Lady Macbeth unaware of the fact that they are planning to murder him in cold blood at night to usurp his throne. The king believes their lies and deception because they were deceptively sweet and grateful hosts. However the audience could make out that they have a wicked scheme in progress behind their pleasant masks.

And once the murder has been discovered, Lady Macbeth comments on the 'hideous trumpet' that 'calls to parley/The sleepers of the house', feigning shock that such a thing could happen 'in our house'. In setting their labour against the king, denying the true rewards of just labour, labouring falsely, and by failing to maintain their household as a safe haven, the Macbeths align themselves with those in the parable who are range against the master and who fatally desire more than is their due.<sup>15</sup>

One more irony could be seen where Macbeth encounters Banquo's ghost after his death. Unlike Hamlet where everyone could see King Hamlet's ghost but in Macbeth no one was able to see Banquo's ghost except Macbeth which was nothing but his delirium due to the crime he had committed. Nevertheless the audience could see that Macbeth is hallucinating Banquo's ghost and they also come to know the reason why is he is hallucinating him? However the other guests present in the scene have no idea about the ghost and they deem Macbeth as a disturbed person who is unstable in his mind. On the other hand, while the audience could clearly make out Macbeth's devious side; the people present around him were completely unaware of his deceitful scheming and considered him a sincere and an honest man.

### **Irony behind the new prophecies of the witches:-**

1. Beware of Macduff
2. Nobody born of a woman could ever harm Macbeth.
3. Macbeth could never be vanquished unless Birnam woods come to Dunsinane.

Such distorted and illusionary versions of the prophecies by the witches made Macbeth over confident; the reality behind it was that Macbeth was as normal as any other human could be. And it just needed a strong competitor who could win over Macbeth and it had nothing to do with a man born of a woman or not; rather it is an impossible situation created by Shakespeare since every person is born of a woman. Such an indistinct and deceptive version of the witches gained Macbeth's trust on them and he believed that he is indestructible as no man is born without a woman. Whereas the prophecies are illogical and Shakespeare brought in a kind of cesarean that Macduff's mother had her stomach untimely ripped apart for Macduff to come out only to prove that Macbeth could be killed by a man born of an abnormal way. Another irony could be seen in the movement of the Birnam forest coming to Dunsinane hill which is also an indistinct version of playing with the words that Macbeth could not be harmed unless Birnam is moved from its place up to Dunsinane hills. Such prophecy sounds extremely illogical, foolish and ludicrous to say that the forest will ever move from its position to kill Macbeth. However, the movement of the soldiers led by Malcom and Macduff camouflaging themselves with the barks of the trees and their branches from Birnam to Dunsinane does not coincide with the words of the witches. Another irony can be seen that Macbeth was never an ally of the witches rather he was another victim for them who could be trapped in their warped and charming prophecies; this shows that the witches were inherently evil; they only served their own purpose of destroying people and bringing out their darkest desires to hurt humanity. This was their actual act in which they succeeded.

**Irony in Macbeth's death:** Macbeth in its genesis is ironic as Shakespeare wastes no time in bringing out various dramatic ironies amidst the play. First thing, that Macbeth did not know that King Duncan has already made him the thane of Cawdor; which holds significance for Macbeth unbeknownst to this fact is gullible and trusts the witches wholeheartedly. On the other hand Macbeth's mask and his duplicity is also ironical as he is a saint, a comrade, a trustworthy friend and a general in the eyes of Duncan; the king is completely unaware of the fact that the person he deems to be fully trustworthy and saintly is one day going to stab him in his back and seize his kingdom. However Macbeth issues a warning:

the greatest risk to the inner life comes from the delusion that it does not exist.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> John Drakakis & Dale Townshend, ed. *Arden Early Modern Drama Guides: Macbeth A Critical Reader*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, p.161.

<sup>16</sup> Kate Flaherty. Australia National University.



Macbeth's spirit is in contrast with his outward characteristics, his spirit is tainted with impure thoughts and villainy whilst his outward behavior shows that he is a good character man, amicable, valiant and likable; Macbeth is the best example of Jekyll and Hyde. It should also be noted that through the play Macbeth and his wife exchange their murderous thoughts with each other. After Lady Macbeth's instigation Macbeth murders King Duncan and Banquo; and sooner Banquo was killed; Lady Macbeth begins loathing murders where as Macbeth starts liking the murderous ways. At this time Macbeth's ambitions begin to surpass Lady Macbeth and her evil. And Macbeth though consumed with guilt never surrenders to either his guilt or to the people. And even though he was troubled from inside and somewhat ashamed of his sins; yet his real male character is projected in Macbeth at this point. Resultantly he keeps on pushing like Doctor Faustus for more and more materialism and power, very well knowing that it is not worth pursuing anymore. Macbeth and his wife could not salvage themselves because they did not want to accept their guilt; hence there was no redemption for them since Macbeth and Lady Macbeth chose their ambitions over and above all consequences. Macbeth had become so hard hearted that hearing his wife's news that she had committed suicide did not shed a single tear for her death as he had fully stripped off his humanity and emotions. After her suicide same was inevitable for Macbeth at this point exactly like doctor Faustus. Eternal damnation was his consequence and it was tragic. Macbeth could have been saved from all his miseries had he not given into his vices. It is indeed ironical to learn that Macbeth was also a mortal being like others around him and he was not any supreme being or immortal as he had believed that he cannot be killed by anyone. Finally he was defeated by Macduff and he dies by his sword; thereby his tyrannical rule was put to an end. However the last part is also lost in its obscurity since the audience could not know that Malcolm was a better king than his predecessor or worse?

**Soliloquy and tension:** Under coercive situations when man talks to himself; it is the sign of his extreme mental tension which s/he is not able to carry on. And though Macbeth rises to the throne and power yet it all actually meant the downfall of his moral compass. Soliloquies in Macbeth are important in the play as they help the viewer or the reader to get to know the mental psyche of a person on a deeper level. It is to be noted that Shakespeare's another famous hero Hamlet also used to indulge in long soliloquies as he was gradually descending into madness; Hamlet was also not able to carry his mental status and it became a mental derailment for him.

On the other hand soliloquy helps us to understand the character and his discord within the functioning of his conscious. Soliloquy is a very personal psychological disposition that caters to the subconscious of a person as the character is not communicating with others but to self. Macbeth's soliloquy reveals a lot about him, his condition, and his mindset and psyche. His moral and emotional turmoil looks rife in the way he over thinks and talks to himself. It also shows what makes Macbeth a tragic hero and not just a cold blooded murderer or a villain. The first soliloquy of Macbeth can be seen when he is contemplating over the murder of King Duncan and its outcome. Macbeth's soliloquy often shows his rampant internal struggles as his mind is at constant war between his clear conscious and his evil thoughts. However it can also be noticed that murder was never the intention of Macbeth in its first place as he can be seen standing on the cross road thinking whether he should go ahead with his plans or he should retrieve. Even though we take a peek at his rising criminal intent he never voiced them before knowing the prophecies of the witches. And though he was tempted by them yet he was not brave enough to attempt the assassination. One of the important soliloquies in Macbeth play throws light on his psyche and his mental tension leading him to hallucination of a bloodied dagger forcing him towards the bedroom chamber of King Duncan. Secondly, another important soliloquy can be seen in the dehumanization of Macbeth after Lady Macbeth's suicide. And his famous speech shows his life that has been overturned into an empty, unhappy, tormenting abyss full of guilt and suffering; Macbeth was badly disturbed and he delivers one of the most famous dialogues written by Shakespeare about the uncertainty of a desperate life.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.<sup>17</sup>

Macbeth's pessimism can be seen here how disappointed he was after his wife's suicide due to all his criminal action that he had taken against the king. His life had become a travesty as he had ceased to care for anything or for anyone in life; he had craved for more power leaving him empty and bereft into a complete confusion with no feelings. His life was a complete failure that turned him into utter chaos. In fact it is a contradiction of what Macbeth is murmuring in his desperation mentioned above that: Life is not a walking shadow a poor player... neither, it is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing rather life is full of worth and beautiful, if it is lived in accordance to the ethical standards of God. Actually the consequences met by Macbeth was not his first choice since it was not smooth sailing in the beginning; and under the coercion of his wife he committed the evil act; consequently his suffering had become intolerable day by day. He was haunted by the ghosts of the people he had brutally murdered without mercy. Lady Macbeth was fighting her own demon becoming insane in the process resulting into her suicide; she could not face what she had done along with her husband. On the other hand Macbeth's enemies Malcolm and Macduff were also closing in towards him to take the revenge for the murders of their dear one's. Macbeth's psyche completely deranged, and he does not accept anything he had done wrong which made matters worse for him and the soliloquy reveals that life has no meaning for Macbeth it is futile in his existence and he lost himself in order to gain power by utmost evil strategy.

It was not only Macbeth's soliloquy but Lady Macbeth also had an ample amount of soliloquy in the play. Immediately after receiving the letter from Macbeth about the prophecies of the witches Lady Macbeth instantly revealed her true character and the audience were able to make out that she was more ambitious than Macbeth and how her husband was deficient of courage and confidence and how he

<sup>17</sup> Rajendra Paul. Macbeth. Rama Brothers India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi. 2023. p.270.

was not persistent enough to take this golden opportunity. Therefore she takes the command in her own hands and implores to the evil spirits to smother her tenderness and strengthen her feminine character so that she could be strong enough in her resolve; and she pleads to the dark forces to cover the world with darkness so that no one could shake her faith that she deemed it will lead her and her husband to happy and joyful life after the murder of King Duncan and also that it will hide them from people to witness their evil act of assassination. But all was in vain; both lost not only their titles of king and queen but their lives as well.

### Conclusion:

Macbeth a hero of the Shakespearean tragedy turned villain is a marvelous piece of literature that has attracted innumerable viewers and readers of the world with great appreciation. However the ruthlessness of Macbeth projected by Shakespeare in the play for the desire of power and position turns him into a villainous man who surrenders before the witches' supernatural trap and also to his wife Lady Macbeth's psychological persistence. He becomes a stupid coward by killing his own king and thereafter a brutal killer of his own friends and common public under foolish notions and pressure. Shakespeare becomes the ultimate hero for making such a beautiful play that vacillate the feelings of the viewers and the readers. The play is nicely maneuvered and all characters are appropriately launched at the right time and at the right place. Macbeth begins his role as an excellent general and a faithful man to King Duncan who is rewarded the title of thane of Cawdor for his bravado, besides all the good words spoken by the king for him. Macbeth's very entrance in the court of the king in blood stained clothes itself proves his loyalty and gallantry for the king; but this over confidence of the king on Macbeth later becomes the reason of Duncan's assassination by his most trusted man. This play has many ironies purposely placed in by Shakespeare to create suspense; and the soliloquy was positioned as a tool to make the viewers and the readers understand the play correctly. The role of the witches and their prophecies were dubious and full of wickedness according to their very nature as they play all foul to destroy Macbeth and the beautiful Scotland and its people; Lady Macbeth was another character made responsible for the entire episode that ends in tragedy. At the end of the play Macduff is successful in killing Macbeth and avenging his family and the king by beheading Macbeth. Macduff finally eradicate Macbeth's ruthless tyranny and sanitized all the filth and sickness that permeated in the air of Scotland. The play takes the same route of storytelling where all's well that ends well and peace dominates conflict. One thing is left unresolved that was stated by the witches that Banquo's lineage or his son Fleance will become the king. Such prophecies show that the witches were not fully reliable and their main intention was to bring malice into the hearts of people and create chaos and to destroy lives. It was protracted by Shakespeare that though evil deeds bring wealth, power and pleasure that satiates the person's desire but it is short lived and is temporary; it does not last forever. In fact the price to be paid is higher than what the person bargains for. In this play Macbeth and Lady Macbeth had to suffer painfully through madness, schizophrenia, somnambulism, guilt and finally death. This in Macbeth's case slowly turned into rage and paranoia. Macbeth had what it took to be a great leader, an admirable ruler and fighter with heroism but all was foiled for his enormous lust for power and his blinding ambitions that never flourished his kingdom nor his own life; rather he was deemed to be a cruel tyrant and was finally slain by his enemy. In all, the play is excellently placed by Shakespeare where I find him as the real hero.

### Bibliography

- Ann Thompson, Macbeth: The State of Play: The Arden Shakespeare, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, London.
- Brown John Russell, Shakespearean Tragedy, (A.C.Bradley), III ed. 1992, St. Martin's Press, New York.
- Drakakis John & Dale Townshend, Macbeth A Critical Reader Arden Early Modern Drama Guides, Bloomsbury, 2013, London.
- Graham Bradshaw, The Connell Guide to Shakespeare's Macbeth by 2012, Chippenham, Wiltshire. .
- Nick Moschovakis. ed. Macbeth. New Critical Essays: Shakespearean Criticism Vol.32. London, New York Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Raffel Burton, Macbeth, William Shakespeare, The Annotated Shakespeare, 2005, Yale University Press, London.
- Rajendra Paul, Macbeth 35<sup>th</sup> ed. Rama Brothers India Pvt. Ltd. 2023.
- Susan Snyder, Macbeth: A Modern Perspective, Swarthmore College. Quoted by Kate Flaherty Australia National University.